JAVANESE MYSTICISM AND ART:
A CASE OF ICONOGRAPHY AND HEALING

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Some contemporary artists in Indonesia, specifically in Central Java, consider making and understanding art a part of their spiritual practices. Some strive to know the iconography of monuments of the past, not as archaeologists, but in order to understand the mystical messages embodied there. At the same time many of these artists are developing a personal, modern visual language of their own. Their spiritual orientation causes them to see mythology and monuments as living texts relevant to the choices contemporary Indonesians make in their daily lives. These spiritual views in turn influence the artists' perception of the creative process and the self in relation to this process. I will be discussing below an instance in which a mystically inclined Javanese painter looked to classical Hindu-Javanese art and to the *wayang* tradition as sources of healing. Then I will briefly discuss his work.

Aspects of Javanese mysticism, variously called *kebatinan* (mysticism, spiritualism) or *kejawen* (Javanism), at times glossed as "Javanese science" or "philosophy," have been studied by Dutch and other Western scholars since the colonial era.[1] *Kebatinan*—"all the beliefs that concern potency and the imperceptible world"[2]—has also been the subject of Javanese and Indonesian-language studies, the latter especially in the last two decades.[3] Because those who study and practice *kebatinan* lack formal organizations *kebatinan* is seen as poten-

[1] Studies such as Douwe Adolf Rinkes, *Abdoerraoef van Singkel: Bijdrage tot de kennis van de mystiek op Sumatra en Java* (Heerenveen: Hepkema, 1909), and Louis A. Bachler, *Gadadara inggih Rama Kresna: kepetik saking serat-serat ingkang kawedalaken dateng* (Jakarta: Lodji, 1921), are examples of biographical and literary approaches to indigenous mysticism. See the sociological discussion of mysticism and mystical sects, with interesting passages of informants explaining their history and personal experiences, in Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 309–52. Other sources on the subject will be found in the footnotes below.

[2] Ward Keeler, *Javanese Shadow Plays, Javanese Selves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 109.

[3] For the sake of simplicity, and because an in-depth discussion of the complexities of the subject is not my aim here, I will continue to use the term *kebatinan*.

tially uncontrollable and has become a subject of scrutiny for the Indonesian government.[4] It has been argued that *kebatinan* involves ideas and practices that carry back to pre-Indic influence. Stange writes that mosques, like the Hindu-Buddhist temples before them, "were erected on a landscape already profoundly infused with spiritual tradition."[5] Today *kebatinan* is a syncretic mix of Hindu-Buddhist, Islamic, and indigenous animist beliefs and practices, based on a belief in "the essential oneness of all existence."[6] It is practiced both by individuals and in groups and may involve meditation, ascetic exercises, fasting, study, and discussion—all directed towards embracing life in all its minute details as a total religious experience.

Like any "living thing," *kebatinan* is practiced in many different ways by different groups, who tie their specific approach to person-centered histories or genealogies—in some cases leading right back to Mohammed.[7] These groups center on a *guru*, who commands the loyalty of followers numbering anything from a few individuals to thousands of people on a regional, national, and even international basis.[8] Although these groups vary in practice and use of terminology, the essential content of their teachings is similar. Far from being a strictly codified, dogmatic belief system, *kebatinan*, as do many other cultural creations of Java, illustrates the idea of syncretism—the combining of elements from different religions or cultures which, from an external, logical perspective, appear to contradict each other.

In the practice of *kebatinan*, Geertz writes, "the final appeal is always to (emotional) experience which carries its own meaning. God, forms of worship, and views of the nature of man, are always validated on these grounds—never on grounds of logic or essential rationality, ... [or] social consequences . . ." It is always "the quality of experience" itself which validates one's spiritual insights.[9]

During both meditation and question-and-answer sessions with the *guru*, it is thought necessary to make the transition from "thought-centered" to "feeling-centered" awareness, so that one can "experience rather than simply understand what is meant"—only in this way does one retain the insight, without it just going "right through one."[10]

Life is seen as a mystical journey, proceeding in four stages from the outer to the inner realms. Rather than being a passive victim of fate, man has the power to direct his own spiritual progress.[11] The first stage in the mystical journey consists in correct living, according to

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[4] In 1978 a separate branch of the Ministry of Religious Affairs was established called the Directorate of Local Beliefs, under the Directorate General of Culture, which is under the Department of Education and Culture; see Haryati Soebadio, *Cultural Policy in Indonesia* (Paris: Unesco, Studies and Documents on Cultural Policy, 1985), p. 21.

[5] Paul Stange, "The Sumarah movement in Javanese mysticism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1980), p. 33.

[6] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 20.

[7] Ibid., p. 331.

[8] For example, the headquarters of Subud, one of the biggest groups, is in London. In the Jakarta *asrama*, numerous foreigners reside on a semi- or permanent basis. There have been several studies of Sumarah, another large group counting many members internationally. See, for example, Paul D. Stange, *Sumarah, Javanese Mysticism in the Revolutionary Period* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).

[9] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 318.

[10] Paul Stange, "The Logic of Rasa in Java," *Indonesia* 38 (October 1984): 113–34; p. 119.

[11] Niels Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life in Contemporary Java: Cultural Persistence and Change* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1978), p. 15.

social and religious etiquette and laws. At this stage, man is still living in his outer aspects.[12] The second stage constitutes the first step towards a fuller inner life: this stage implies perfecting and reflecting upon behavior and ethics in the outer world. In the third stage of the mystical journey, man begins to confront truth; at this point the differences between various forms of religious ritual and expressions appear meaningless. Finally at the fourth stage, the goal of complete insight and "eternal unity between Master and servant" is reached.[13]

Meditation is considered an important way to gain insight and strength. It may involve getting in touch with the spirits of ancestors or other powerful beings. In one form of meditation, one's mind-spirit is guided step by step through the stages outlined above, duplicating the mystical journey. The first step, removing oneself from the outer world, is initiated by the act of withdrawing into silence to meditate. A student of meditation described the process like this:

> The first part [of the meditation] represents the Micro-level; the next represents the Macro-level; the third is the Cosmic/Universal. To grasp this, it is easier for me to think in terms of first concentrating on and understanding the Self, then the world and all of nature around the Self, then finally the Universal Principle itself. The specific symbols and colors that appear during meditation have different meanings depending upon in which of the three stages they occur.[14]

A Case of Art and Healing

A Hindu-Javanese temple, *wayang* puppets, Javanese mysticism, and contemporary painting all connected with each other in an interesting way during my fieldwork in Indonesia. Jono, a painter who practiced *kebatinan*,[15] had been asked to meditate on the health of someone just diagnosed by one of Yogyakarta's most famous Western-trained medical doctors as suffering from a "fist-size, probably malignant tumor, requiring immediate operation."[16]

Meditating around midnight, after first purifying the room with holy water, incense, and flowers bought at the market the same morning, Jono had a vision which consisted of two images. The first was a *wayang* shadow-puppet figure passing across the sky, heading South. The sky in front of the figure was black and behind it, white. Then the light turned, the sky became green, and the shape of a *candi* emerged—a temple consisting of three towers, the central one taller than the two which flanked it.

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[12] Mystical practices have often intersected with politics in Indonesian history, as in the faith in the invulnerability rendered by the use of spells and the wearing of amulets and allegiance to certain spiritual leaders. In the early 1970s, *malam tirakatan* (night of meditation) preceded important rallies or demonstrations during student protest movements; see Rendra, *The Struggle of the Naga Tribe*, translated and introduced by Max Lane (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979) p. 51, translator's note 65.

[13] Ibid., pp. 22–23.

[14] From my fieldnotes.

[15] The painter, his artist-partner, and the patient requested anonymity and therefore fictional names have been used. Both the artist partner and the patient were foreign women familiar with Javanese culture. Clearly the presence of foreigners in the present story may have influenced interactions in ways that an all-Javanese cast would not have—such is the nature of field-work.

[16] From interview with the painter's artist-partner, Yogyakarta, November 1987.

The role of the visionary does not necessarily include elaborating on his visions.[17] This meditation vision was at first described only briefly to the patient, without further explication. Appropriate to such interactions in Java, the patient received it gratefully, without comment, and the small party lapsed into silence. In my own experience this silence rarely seemed comfortable in Java. It was as if no-one knows what to say and fears saying something inappropriate. Rules of etiquette prevent spontaneity from lightening the situation.[18]

Following this period of strained silence, then, the patient timidly started to question the painter about the meaning of the images through a mutual friend present, a woman who had been practicing both art and meditation with him for several years. According to Javanese etiquette, which prohibits direct and intense questioning of a person to whom you owe respect, this woman played the role of intermediary and interpreter.[19]

At first Jono answered, eyes averted, that the meaning of the vision was not entirely clear to him. While he continued to sit immobile, gaze withdrawn, his helper explained that he was also reticent because he did not want to hurt the patient's feelings by communicating too directly that she would have to consider rearranging the priorities of her life.[20]

Was the *wayang* figure a specific one, a recognizable character? Jono said that it was not: there had been no details with which to identify it. It was a *wayang* figure in the general sense. After a long time of circling around the issue it became clear that what was important were the black and white areas in the sky. In Javanese mysticism, Jono said, black symbolizes one's worldly (self-serving material and physical) desires (*nafsu*), while white symbolizes one's objective context (*kenyataan*). The two colors together symbolize the direction one's outer and inner life takes, when one's choices are in harmony with one's personality and the outer circumstances of one's life.

The problem with the image in the vision was that the black was in front of the white, leading it, rather than the other way around. This order indicated that the patient's ideals led her more strongly than did a realistic evaluation of her concrete life-situation. This tendency had led to a spiritual imbalance which could lead not only to further spiritual sickness but also to physical disease.

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[17] There are many types of visionaries in Indonesia, from the ordinary man or woman who claims some psychic abilities, to the village *dukun*, and the *guru*, traditionally with ties to the courts. The visionaries rely more on their own experience with meditation, asceticism, and visions than on any written body of doctrine. Since most of the literature (Mangkunegara, Mulder, Geertz, Stange) deals more with general aspects of various *kebatinan* groups than with instances of specific meditations or visions, complete with symbolic interpretations, I do not know how generally acceptable the "reading" given by the painter here would be.

[18] The atmosphere experienced by the author contrasts to that described by Mulder as typical during *latihan*— spiritual exercise sessions. Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, pp. 29–30. This may be due to the fact that the incident at which I was present was not a regular *latihan* session, but a private interview, and the fact that the patient was not one of the regular students/followers of the painter, who had not yet established himself as a *guru* and only practiced informally. For a discussion of rules of language and etiquette governing Javanese interaction, see Ward Keeler, *Javanese: A Cultural Approach* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1984), p. xxvii–xxiv, and the notes to each lesson; James Siegel, *Solo in the New Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), pp. 15–33. For a vivid description of two similar encounters, see Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, p. 66.

[19] Maya, the painter's partner in the small *batik* business they had established in part of the family household, is an American woman who had been studying meditation and Javanese mysticism with Jono and his father for several years.

[20] I want to point out that the pattern of deference to the *guru* figure would not have been qualitatively different if the patient had been a male.

Next, the image of the *candi*. The painter said that this was a picture of the structure of the patient's personality: she was basically oriented towards god. That was one image to which he felt he could give a definite interpretation. Furthermore, the temple was clearly Hindu, Hinduism being a religion "based on the knowledge and insight we get from nature—not like Middle Eastern or Western religions which are based on laws." The patient was told that the temple-image was like the Prambanan temple near Yogyakarta, and that indeed she should go there and study it in order to find a functional model for her life. The patient was told to study the reliefs, to find out what they symbolize and what message there might be in them for her.

"The *wayang* image was heading in the southern direction," Jono said to the patient. "Find out what the southern side of Prambanan symbolizes. South is the direction of the worldly life. You should find a way to harmonize your worldly orientation with your personality (*kepribadian*), which is oriented towards god."

"But you don't have to worry about the tumor itself," Jono said in conclusion: "It is not fatal—it is only a signal, a warning. But if you don't take care of the problem and correct the imbalance, after a long time with more signs, there could be more serious effects. For now you need not worry about your immediate health: the green light in the image is the color of god. If it had been red, that would have been a sign of danger."

The *Wayang* Figure

To interpret the *wayang* figure in the vision, we must look briefly at what *wayang* means in the context of Javanese culture. *Wayang* means "shadow" and is used to denote dramatic performances of various kinds, with either human or puppet actors. On its own, the word stands either for a shadow play performance or for a *wayang* puppet, the latter being the most relevant in our context. The *wayang* shadow puppet performance complex, through which stories from the Hindu and various Javanese folk-epics have been made familiar to the Javanese for centuries, can be seen as the most elaborate and popular visual expression of *kebatinan*.[21]

The history of this art form is unclear. It may have originated in India, where "shadow play" is referred to in the Pali canon of the first century B.C.E.[22] In Java, *wayang* is first mentioned in an inscription found at Prambanan, issued by King Balitung in 907 C.E., where mention is also made of both the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. This inscription documents that the fascination with the Hindu epics in Javanese art, still apparent in the ongoing tradition of *wayang*, has survived for at least eleven hundred years. It is interesting to note the possibility that the historical prototypes for both the image of the temple and the *wayang* figure in the painter's meditation-vision date from the same historically distant era, which Javanese today see as a golden age, spiritually, culturally, and politically.

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[21] "In the *wayang* lies hidden the secret Javanese knowledge concerning the deepest significance of life . . ." wrote Mangkunegara VII of Surakarta. See his essay *On the Wayang Kulit (Purwa) and its Symbolic and Mystical Elements* trans. Claire Holt (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1957), p. 1. One of Mangkunegara's motivations for writing about the *wayang*, he said, was to teach both foreigners and Javanese about a part of the traditional culture in the face of rapid change. The ways in which *wayang* performances and meaning have been changing in the modern era is an important area of investigation which I will not touch upon here, as I am concerned with *wayang* in its broadest sense.

[22] Claire Holt, *Art in Indonesia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 128–29. The earliest mention of shadow puppet plays in China is during the Sung dynasty, when in the eleventhth century, stories from the Three Kingdoms were performed. The earliest mention of Thai shadow puppet plays is in 1458; ibid., p. 130.

The *wayang*—as art-form, philosophy, and frame of reference—still has a variety of functions in Javanese culture: it is placed in the group of "refined" art forms along with *batik, gamelan* music, the making of *keris* daggers, court-dances, and court-poetry.[23] Furthermore, it is still, although in changing form, one of the most popular types of village entertainment.[24] A *wayang* performance is believed to have the power to protect, cure, and exorcise. It also lends to Javanese a vocabulary for the classification of personality and provides cosmic analogies to characters and events within the realm of earthly politics.[25] *Wayang* represents both the philosophical and the spiritual-magical aspects of *kebatinan*. In Central Java, the most frequently used source for *wayang* performances, at least during the hundred years or so of Dutch and Javanese writing about *wayang*, has been the *Mahabharata*, in which the five Pandawa brothers are pitted against their large group of cousins, the Korawa. The world is divided into two, represented by Pandawa (right) and Korawa (left); the conniving, competing, and final fullscale war between the two, is frequently simplified into a battle between "good" and "bad." At its most sophisticated level, however, *wayang* expresses the full range of thought of Javanese mysticism, in which god is seen in everything. According to this view, apparent dualities played out in the stories are only resolved temporarily; the perspective of ultimate reality or truth is amoral and timeless and cannot be fathomed by men.[26]

Every Javanese, except perhaps some members of the urban generation under thirty years old for whom TV and movies have largely replaced *wayang*, recognizes the figures of Arjuna, Bhima, Kreshna, Durna, and others, not to speak of the beloved figures of Semar and the clown-retainers—Javanese additions to the Indian epic. Everyone recognizes Srikandhi as the beautiful but somewhat too active and courageous female archer, second wife of Arjuna—another Javanization of the original *Mahabharata*.[27] Javanese discourse is

[23] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 261; Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, p. 81.

[24] James Siegel attests to the fact that *wayang* continues to be an important source of imagery in Java.

[25] B. R. O'G. Anderson, *Mythology and the Tolerance of the Javanese* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1965; 4th printing 1982); G. J. Resink, "From the Old *Mahabharata* to the New *Ramayana* Order," in *Bijdragen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 131 (1975): 214–35. See also Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, p. 32 for stories of how Sukarno used *wayang* for his political ends, and in turn was almost undone by the power of one of the stories which, according to the Javanese view, turned on him. See Willard A. Hanna, *The Magical-Mystical Syndrome in the Indonesian Mentality*, Southeast Asia Series, Vol.XV, nos. 5–9, for a discussion of how both Sukarno and Suharto have used *dukun* for advice and guidance and legitimation of their power, with sketches of some of the central mystics involved.

[26] Geertz, *Religion of Java*, p. 270. On the notion of paired opposites, see below. Here I would just like to point out how the lack of simplistically opposed values is illustrated in the way in which qualities of nobility, loyalty, and divine insight are also associated with characters fighting on the Korawa side. Furthermore, the opposition of "right" and "left" refers to the *dalang's* perspective, whereas the audience on the other side of the screen sees the inversion of this. Here lie intriguing possibilities for interpretations relating to esoteric knowledge, social hierarchy, and gender which must be pursued elsewhere.

[27] Not having read any literature concerning the specifics of these changes of the original text in the course of Javanization, I was surprised, while traveling to Ajanta in central India with a Brahmin university rector in the summer of 1988, to be told that Srikandhi—a female figure in Javanese *wayang*—is a male in the Indian version of the *Mahabharata*: prince Sikhandi [sic] is the reincarnation of Amba, daughter of the king of Kāsi, whose revenge for failure in love can only be wreaked on Bhisma in a later lifetime if she is reborn a man. With my self-appointed brahmin teacher I tried to pursue a discussion of the fascinating process of cultural assimilation and native psychology that must lie behind this kind of rewriting, but he was so shocked and, it seemed, disgusted at this bastardization of the text that he would not discuss it further. (For a synopsis of the Indian version, see Narasimhan, *The Mahabharata* [New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965], p. xvi).

To further convolute the question of Srikandhi, Benedict Anderson related the following: When he himself asked about this difference between the Indian and the Indonesian versions in the mid-1960s, Mas Purnadi, pro-

filled with references to *wayang* figures and their characters, likening people to this one or that one, or choosing one as a model to emulate. Questions concerning a person's favorite *wayang* figure are not answered lightly, yet every major person in Indonesian cultural or political life does seem to have a favorite.

Given the specific characteristics of the individual *wayang* figures, identified by differences in facial expression, bodily proportions, bearing of the head, as well as by details of clothing, jewelry, and hairstyle, how should one read a *wayang* figure, in the generic sense, such as the one seen in the painter's vision?

In its most generic sense, a Javanese *wayang* figure, with its high degree of stylized reference to the human body, is an image or shadow of that aspect of a human being which is itself immaterial; thus the projection of its shadow on the screen by the use of light, may be seen as the shadow of a shadow.[28] This two-steps-remove from any notion of realistic portrayal, in itself indicates that a *wayang* figure represents something invisible to the physical eye, which merely records the optical illusions of which the material world, in *kebatinan* philosophy, is thought to consist. The *wayang* figure represents that part of man which, though invisible, is not illusory, but real: the soul or spirit (*batin*). And since *batin* is also that part of man which is divine, its "form" (visualized as a fluttering shadow) is simultaneously an image of the gods. Thus the *wayang* figure links man directly to the divine principle.

In contrast to a specific *wayang* character, the generic *wayang* figure calls to mind *all* the battles, struggles, victories, and losses, in the realms of love and of power, experienced by the numerous characters in the Indian epics. Gathering all these references into a single symbolic figure, the *wayang* comes to represent a perception of the self which is not only imbued with infinite potential but also embodies a duality: it is a self in which desires and illusions war with the "real"; a self torn between that which is *not* universal and divine in every human being and that which *is*.

This duality fits in with other paired opposites in the system of *kebatinan* thought. These opposites—ultimately, at the deepest levels of mystical insight, seen as connected and identical—are, when translated into values as they operate in the material world, nonetheless ranked hierarchically; a Javanese expression of how all things are equal, but how (in practice) "some are more equal than others."[29] Among such opposites may be found, aside from "outward, corporeal aspect < inner aspect" (*lahir < batin*), also such pairs as "microcosmos < cosmos" (*Jagad cilik < Jagad gede*); "material reality < ultimate reality" (*realitas < kenyataan*); "rational understanding < intuitive insight" (*ratio < rasa*); "coarse < refined" (*kasar < halus*).[30]

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fessor at the Law Faculty at University of Indonesia and son of Purbatjaraka, "laughed and said that of course people in the kraton knew quite well that Srikandhi was a man, a man who liked to dress up as a woman, and with whom Arjuna had a homosexual relationship—'That's why Srikandhi is the only woman in *wayang* who doesn't have any children, heh-heh!'" But this, Mas Purnadi said, would be difficult for the people to understand or deal with, so the popular *wayang* treats 'him' as an ordinary woman." Personal communication with Benedict Anderson, August 1990.

[28] Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, p. 123.

[29] This contrasts to the ideal model of binary opposites, as illustrated in the Taoist symbol of yin and yang. It may also contrast to an originally Hindu ideal of the unity of equal pairs, as illustrated in the *lingga-yoni* symbol. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty discusses the bias towards the male aspect, and all those that are grouped with it; see *Women, Androgynes and Other Mythical Beasts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[30] Mulder, *Mysticism and Everyday Life*, pp. 13–18. Such binary opposites are usually in the literature placed on either side of a colon (:). More attention needs to be paid to the meaning of this third factor in what is described as systems of dualities, which indicates the nature of the relationship between them. It is interesting to note that

In this system of unequal complementary opposites, it appears from the horizontal perspective of a single lifetime that some men are inferior to others. This inequality is mirrored in the social hierarchy, which is based on both birth and differing abilities, the two being ultimately connected.[31] In the same way, as one man appears inferior to another, all men appear inferior to the gods. However, the idea that the lesser of the pairs shadows the greater is an idea imbued with potential power. Man may be an imperfect image; he is nonetheless an image of god, and his personal battles are shadows of universal ones. Thus the tensions played out between the Korawa and the Pandawa may be seen as an allegory of the struggles of a single human being between his earthly, physical, and material desires and his longing for spiritual development—between the self and the soul.

The image of a generic *wayang* figure traveling across the sky comes to mean the self on its mystical journey through the world of material illusions and inequalities, in search of unification with the divine. In the vision, the *wayang* figure was led by its ideals, reluctantly trailing the circumstantial realities of its life. The image of a soul in imbalance, it was trapped in a physical body now growing tumors from the burden of skewed perception and misdirected action. The idea that each person's way to god must be suited to his/her personality and outer life-circumstances, learning to live in harmony with both their inherent challenges and limitations, is what the image is conveying to the patient.

Seeking at the Temple

As background to the second part of the meditation-vision—the image of the *candi*—we note that the building of Javanese *candi* in stone probably dates to the beginning of the eighth century.[32] The *candi* are believed to have been erected to commemorate and possibly to hold the ashes of deceased royalty, deposited in a casket under a statue of the dead king or queen depicted in the form of a Hindu or Buddhist deity.[33] As the two religions co-existed in Central Java from the eighth century on, each inspired uniquely Javanese architectural and sculptural styles and iconographies in numerous temple structures throughout Central and East Java.

The structure of the *candi* as a whole was understood to symbolize Mahameru, the Cosmic Mountain. Its base (*bhurloka*) represented the sphere of mortals, the temple-body (*bhuvarloka*) the sphere of the purified, and the superstructure (*svarloka*) the sphere of the gods.[34]

These temples served as focal points for the rituals of the new religions, imported with their highly developed cosmologies, fully visualized in architectural and iconographical detail. The temples also provided focus for the cult of kings, as represented by the idealized

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the lesser of these pairs often are named with Western loan-words. It makes one wonder what words were originally used in texts or by *guru* to denote these qualities and how their meanings and relative status have subsequently been changed.

[31] Ibid., p. 16.

[32] According to Dumarcay, there were probably wooden *candi* several centuries earlier, as the fifth century inscription of King Purnavarman of Taruma (near Jakarta) demonstrates; Jacques Dumarcay, *The Temples of Java* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 9.

[33] Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, p. 39. The exact function of the *candi* is not clear and is still under debate. It is possible that, in the same way that stupas were non-functional, purely symbolic structures, with no usable interior spaces, the *candi* were symbolic or commemorative markers or products of merit-making activity; see Adrian Snodgrass, *The Symbolism of the Stupa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Studies on Southeast Asia, 1985).

[34] Soekmono, "Notes on the Monuments of Ancient Indonesia," in *Ancient Indonesian Art of the Central and Eastern Javanese Periods*, ed. Fontein, Soekmono and Suleiman (New York: The Asia Society, 1971), p. 14.

figure of a historical human being—a Javanese development of the Indian tradition of the god-king. The temples thus functioned as metaphors in stone for both macrocosm and microcosm, mirroring the cosmic order and the political realm at its most ideal.[35]

The Prambanan, a Hindu-Javanese temple complex built by the Sanjayas of Central Java in the latter part of the ninth century C.E., has been called "the most magnificent of all Shivaite monuments in Indonesia."[36] As the largest of the Shivaite temples in Java, it exemplifies the ideal arrangement which was adhered to from the eighth to the thirteenth century. Its plan is cruciform and the four main statues are placed correctly in their various chambers in the central structure.[37] The three main temples all face East: the central temple is dedicated to Shiva, the flanking ones to Vishnu (North) and Brahma (South). Facing these three temples are three structures which once housed the mounts of the gods: Shiva's bull Nandi, Vishnu's bird Garuda, and Brahma's goose Hamsa.[38] Probably the most well known feature of the Shiva temple are the reliefs running on the inside of the balustrade of the gallery, depicting scenes from the Ramayana.

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At this point we return to the narrative of the patient with the tumor and the meditation vision. The patient had been to Prambanan several times, but never with the specific focus of seeking clues to her life in the images and reliefs. She now went there with a Javanese girl-friend (a young woman rarely goes anywhere alone in Central Java) at six-thirty in the morning to avoid the throngs of school children and tourists who every day swarm around the temple area from eight in the morning till sundown. They first climbed the Shiva temple, paid quick obeisance to the Shiva-statue in the central chamber (semi-facetiously, as the young in Java often behave vis-a-vis the unfamiliar rituals and beliefs of older generations). Then they sought the subsidiary chambers: in the northern one they found Durga, stepping victoriously on the bull, her sword above her head; in the western one they found Ganesha seated—plump, rich, and worldly-wise. Then, with a certain amount of excitement, they sought the south chamber—and found a potbellied elder with a long beard: Agastya.

The patient and her friend walked round the gallery looking at the Ramayana-reliefs on the southern wall: here was depicted the figure of Rama after the awakening of Vishnu (Rama being an incarnation of that deity); Rama and Laksmana fighting demons; Rama winning the hand of Sita in the archery contest, and the departure of Rama, Laksmana, and Sita to exile in the forest.

The Vishnu temple to the north, still in process of reconstruction, was hidden under scaffolding, and as south was the main direction of concern, the patient and her friend went directly to the southern temple, dedicated to Brahma, architect of the universe. Gods and goddesses graced all the outside walls of the temple. On the south, was found, again, the figure of Agastya.

Clearly Agastya was of special importance.The meaning of this figure in Indonesia, however, is complex and unresolved. Statues of a potbellied bearded man of mature age,

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[35] Dumarcay, *Temples of Java*, p. 5. For a discussion of the political realm and the meaning of the king-figure, see Soemarsaid Moertono, *State and Statecraft in Old Java: A Study of the Later Mataram Period* (Ithaca: Cornell Modern Indonesia Project, 1968).

[36] Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, p. 54.

[37] Dumarcay, *Temples of Java*, p. 45.

[38] Ibid.

with certain Shivaite attributes, are variously referred to in the archeological literature as Bhatara Guru (the Javanese name for the Supreme god), Divine Teacher, or Agastya.[39]

Agastya is connected with the cardinal direction South, which, according to the painter, represents the worldly, secular life. This is a simplification of the meaning of South in Hindu symbolism. On various Indian *mandala* depicting the organization of the universe, South, represented by the color yellow, is the region of human habitation. Within the human realm, South is the region attributed to the Vaisyas caste. South is the region of Yama, God of Death, who is clothed in red;[40] it is the region of night, of demons, and the dark feminine force, in Java represented above all by the beautiful but dangerous Nyai Lara Kidul, Queen of the Southern Sea. South is the direction from which come all personifications of things belonging to the worldly dimension as opposed to the divine—which, essentially, once one sees beyond the illusory divisions of things into separate entities, are one.[41]

The consensus is that the figure of Agastya represents, at the very least, a *rishi* (holy teacher)who acts as a spiritual guide, showing the devotee the way to Lord Shiva himself. Another possible interpretation is that he is an aspect of Shiva—Shiva as teacher.[42] In both cases, however, the figure of the teacher, whether as the historical saint or as Shiva, plays an important role. The cult of Agastya was prevalent in Java, as demonstrated by the number of statues and inscriptions relating to it that have been found. There is a work named after him in both Javanese and Sanskrit. Furthermore, a Javanese poem dating to about 1150 C.E. acclaims a court poet as Agastya reincarnated.[43]

Besides being a teacher, Agastya is also believed to have played an important role as a cultural mediator between two different peoples in India: the Aryans of the north and the non-Aryans of the south.[44] He also acts as a facilitator in times of cosmic trouble and as conciliator between quarreling gods.[45] He stands for truth, purity, and power—once within the walls of his hermit abode, "no liar, no cruel person, nor a rogue, nor a sinful person" can remain alive.[46]

After studying the south-facing reliefs on the Shiva temple which depict Rama in struggles pertaining to love, exile, survival, and the combat of evil—illustrating the qualities of faith, courage, and perseverance—and after dwelling on the various meanings of the sage

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[39] See the discussion in Bernet Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art* (Amsterdam: van der Peet, 1959), p. 36, plates 39 and 41; and p. 61, plates 157–58; and in Albert le Bonheur, *La Sculpture Indonésienne au Musée Guimet* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1971), pp. 272–76, which also has further bibliographical references. See also Purbatjaraka's *Agastya in den Archipel* (Leiden: Brill, 1926).

[40] John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology* (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1973), p. 374.

[41] See Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1946, 1972); Snodgrass, *Symbolism of the Stupa*, p. 39; J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 155. In Java, Agastya is always found in the south chamber, or to Shiva's right. This is not always so in India; see G. S. Ghurye, *Indian Acculturation: Agastya and Skanda* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1977), footnote 49, and le Bonheur, *La Sculpture Indonésienne*, p. 274, notes.

[42] This would be another version than the one known as Mahaguru; Agastya is a standing *guru*-figure as opposed to the seated Mahaguru figure known in other depictions.

[43] Ghurye, *Indian Acculturation*, p.77.

[44] Kempers, *Ancient Indonesian Art*, p.37; Ghurye, *Indian Acculturation*, p. 20–21.

[45] Ghurye, *Indian Acculturation*, p. 24.

[46] Ibid., p. 6.

Agastya, the patient began to feel formulating in her mind a personal message about her life's direction. For many years, she said, she had been vacillating between choosing a secular and a religious life, drawn to both but unable to choose. At the same time, despite encouragement and training, she had been avoiding becoming a teacher because of shyness and an unwillingness to place herself before other people in a position of authority. Thus she had found herself stuck, unable to move one way or another. Yet all the clues at Prambanan seemed to highlight the importance of leaving the insecure ego behind and pursuing with courage a path of service, specifically a path of teaching. In her mind the voices of the images in the meditation-vision and on the temple seemed to be saying: "The contradictions you perceive yourself caught between exist only on the surface. The challenges, struggles, and insights of the secular and the religious life are the same; teaching true knowledge—attempting to bridge the gap between the divine and the worldly, the known and the unknown, the foreign and the familiar. This is your duty."

When the patient returned to the painter to discuss what she had seen and thought in relation to the vision, he only gave a small, non-committal smile and did not comment further. Neither did his helper. This, as it turned out, is in accord with the *kebatinan* view that, in the final analysis, it is personal experience that is the ultimate teacher.

Batik and Painting

Although some Javanese painters create canvases that are connected directly with the iconography of Javanese *candi* and Javanese mysticism, Jono (then 30) had worked with more personal images and symbols since, after graduating from highschool, he started devoting his energies to painting. Although he must have received some art education in school, he started painting in oils as an amateur: he did not study with anyone, whether within or outside an art educational institution.[47] In his painting he uses the imagery of women and children in harmonious, mysterious unity with nature, and his work is filled

[47] There is in modern Indonesian painting (which is centered mainly in Java and Bali) a certain aura to the label "self-taught" (*otodidak*) which, I think, ties in with wanting to claim or demonstrate innate creative talent and power in an idiom which comes close to the Javanese idea of spiritual potency. On the institutional level, *otodidak* is used in opposition to "graduate" (*lulus*) or "holding an academic degree" (*sarjana*) and today denotes someone who is an outsider to the increasingly important structure of modern educational institutions and degrees. The deeper implications of *otodidak*, however, tie into older patterns, relationships, and beliefs. According to a pattern of education much older and more fraught with personal, familial, emotional, and spiritual overtones than modern, institutionalized education, artists who are *otodidak* have often studied extensively with individual artists, who play the role of "father" or "*guru*." When finished with this apprenticeship, the younger artist is thought to have imbibed some of the older artist's power and insight which will increase with time. Even within the educational institutions the student's relationship to his or her teacher carries resonances of this older system. (For a discussion of how Islamic *pesantren* education approximates such a model of personalized initiation into the mysteries of life, see Benedict Anderson, "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," in *Culture and Politics* ed. Claire Holt et al (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), pp. 17–77, especially p. 55.) How *otodidak* may imply being in possession of superior spiritual insight can be seen in the other attributes that are cultivated by many artists who use that label, such as long hair (traditionally a sign of holy men, or of people who have demonstrated the ability to mediate between the living and the ancestors, or have demonstrated their spiritual power in other ways, such as a *dalang*) and an irregular lifestyle without regular wages. The "self-taught" painters I met had in most cases either greater originality in their work or greater conformity to traditional spiritual symbolism than academically trained painters. As most of the first generation of Indonesian painters were *otodidak*, by using this term today a painter identifies his spiritual connection with men like Affandi and Hendra. These artists, it could be argued, hold the same powerful position in the minds of the later generations as ancestors have held and still hold in the minds of Indonesians.

with details that hold significance according to *kebatinan*, such as water, plants, animals, seashells, and so on.[48]

Jono had great difficulty in giving titles to his paintings or talking about them. When asked about such matters, he usually answered *"terserah"*—it depends on/ it's up to you. He was reluctant to sign, date, and exhibit his work; at times he even destroyed it. Yet he kept on painting fairly diligently, often late at night when the noise of traffic and people had died down and the commercial *batik* studio was quiet. The process of trying to capture the images in his innermost mind and the frustration of not succeeding was the focus of much of his conversation. At the same time, there was little overt sense that he might learn anything of importance from an art teacher, other painters, or even his artistic partner. The *kebatinan* idea that spiritual progress depends on one's own search and experiences finds here its equivalent in the artistic journey.

Jono would never have labeled himself or his focus in life "artistic." He felt he was only at the very beginning of a total spiritual process, and the paintings themselves were less important than the process they signified. From what I gathered, he saw it as a process of searching between form and no-form, between that which *is* but which cannot be spoken *of*, and that which might be grasped and formulated, given a deep level of spiritual insight. Feeling the urge to paint while experiencing that he could not capture what he "saw"/felt, was extremely painful to him. Lao Tzu's verse "The Tao which can be spoken is not the true Tao" expresses the dilemma Jono felt. In accord with these feelings, he refused to call himself an "artist." By the same logic, he refused to fill out any of my questionnaires or to be interviewed formally about his art, although we talked in informal group situations frequently.

In the last four years, Jono has been painting more abstract pictures in oils, trying to grasp the form and meaning of the moon, symbol of the feminine principle, both during the day and at night, and trying to capture the immaterial, swirling presence of ether—symbol of the masculine and the most elevated of the five elements. His realistic selfportrait (1988; **Plate 1**), painted in monochromes, shows him prostrate before the rising full moon, against a background of swirling air (ether), punctuated by occasional flame-like shapes. The painter's hand is resting on his chest, in a way that might be interpreted as gripping his heart; his visage is enigmatic, hovering between being overwhelmed by the ferment of inner and outer turmoil and willingly yielding, submitting to it.

The painting is composed with a strong diagonal division, marked by the line of the painter's body going from lower right to upper left. The light of the moon fills the upper right triangle thus created; the darkness of the earth on which the painter lies fills the lower left triangle—a use of triangles and color which triggers associations to the polarities in the universe, where darkness and the downward-pointing triangle represents female, earth, the material dimension, death, and light and the upward-pointing triangle represents male, heaven, the spiritual dimension and eternal life. The brightest part of the painting is in the center of the canvas, at the transition point between the dark and the light half: Jono's left eye gleams in the reflection of the moon.

During these last few years Jono has also increasingly been turning his attention to *batik*-painting. The art of *batik* was often passed down from one generation to the next in both noble and village families. As Jono's family had been involved with *batik* in the past, and his

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[48] Because of time constraints and difficulties in communication, I was unfortunately unable to obtain a more detailed explanation of these symbols during my initial period of research in Indonesia.

Plate 1: Jono (pseud.), "Selfportrait" (1988), no dimensions, oil on canvas.
Photo: Astri Wright

Plate 2: AMRI YAHYA, no title, (1988), 36 x 36, batik painting.
Photo: Astri Wright

father was something of a local *guru* in Yogyakarta, it was perhaps natural for his interest to incline in that direction. No doubt his meeting and artistic collaboration with Maya, a textile artist from New York who had come to Java to study traditional *batik* and meditation, further triggered Jono's interest in *batik*.

Convinced that the motifs and designs used in traditional *batik* had originally been imbued with explicit spiritual meaning, the two artists started studying the ancient patterns. *Kawung*, for example, is a pattern derived from the shape of a fruit stylized into four ovals within a square. The cross-design in the center is thought to represent a "universal source of energy," the whole representing the structure of the universe. *Semen*, meaning "sprout" or "grow," is a pattern with various motifs that represent the gods, holy places, animals, Heaven and Earth—the sum of which is thought to refer to fertility worship.[49]

On a formal level, Central Javanese *batik* are patterned with repeated motifs which cover the entire cloth more or less densely, either with geometric patterns or motifs derived from nature. In the geometric designs, negative and positive spaces interlock in a balanced design where both have equal value. There is no attempt to break out of two-dimensionality and to introduce spatial depth. This approach to a pictorial surface echoes throughout Balinese traditional or neo-traditional painting and much of modern Indonesian painting.[50]

In their spiritual research, Maya and Jono interviewed old artists still living in the Yogyakarta courts. They meditated for insights into the original, symbolic meanings of specific motifs, and they sought explanations in the archaeological literature on motifs found on the ancient monuments scattered throughout the region.

Jono's interest in *batik* as it was practiced in ancient times and its spiritual symbolism has resulted in work that is strikingly different from that of the leading abstract *batik* painters who have come to the fore as innovators of the art in Indonesia in the last twenty-five years, such as Amri Yahya and Tulus Warsito, who claim no direct connection with the *kebatinan* culture.[51] Amri Yahya's designs (see **Plate 2**) are abstract plays of color in which a flat silk-

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[49] Inger McCabe Elliot, *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java* (New York: Potter, 1984), p. 68.

[50] Another illustration of such continuity in approaching two-dimensional arts, which I refer to as aesthetic affinity (keeping in mind that the term "aesthetic" here does not preclude a ritual dimension) was given in the summer of 1988, when a group of Aboriginal artists from various northern and western Australian settlements came to study *batik* with Maya and Jono. As ideas about pattern, symbol, meaning, composition, and color were exchanged between the Javanese-American and the Aboriginal contingents, an immediate rapport was established. After ten days, they parted with the feeling that their various views had been greatly enriched in ways that were immediately accessible and even familiar, and that the spiritual and aesthetic links between Javanese *batik* and Aboriginal sand-painting were deep and real, and that the medium of *batik* could easily be adapted to the contemporary expressive demands of the latter. This initial meeting has resulted in annual workshops given to white and Aboriginal Australians by the Javanese-American artist team at various locations in Australia, ranging from art institutes to Aboriginal settlements.

[51] Because of the different technical and historical dimensions that inform it, *batik* painting is not discussed at length here, although, as the only true hybrid form between indigenous two-dimensional textile arts and a modern, painterly expression, it deserves attention. One of the many aspects of *batik* painting that in most cases distinguishes it from oil painting is that most *batik* painters employ craftspeople to do the actual waxing and dying, based on their drawn and painted specifications. One difference between Amri Yahya and Maya/Jono would be that the latter would tend to do more of the actual work on the cloth themselves, so the possibility of the presence of "signature" in their work would be greater. An in-depth study of the modern form called *"batik* painting" has yet to be made, despite the fact that some very interesting *batik* paintings exist in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. The relationship of this painting to traditional *batik*, which in Indonesia achieved such a great diversity of beautifully conceived, designed, and executed patterns and styles ranking in quality with any two-dimensional art, should also be studied. For excellent plates that support this statement, see N. Tirtaamidjaja SH, *BATIK, pola & tjorak—Pattern & Motif*, trans. Benedict Anderson (Jakarta: Penerbit Djambatan, n.d.).
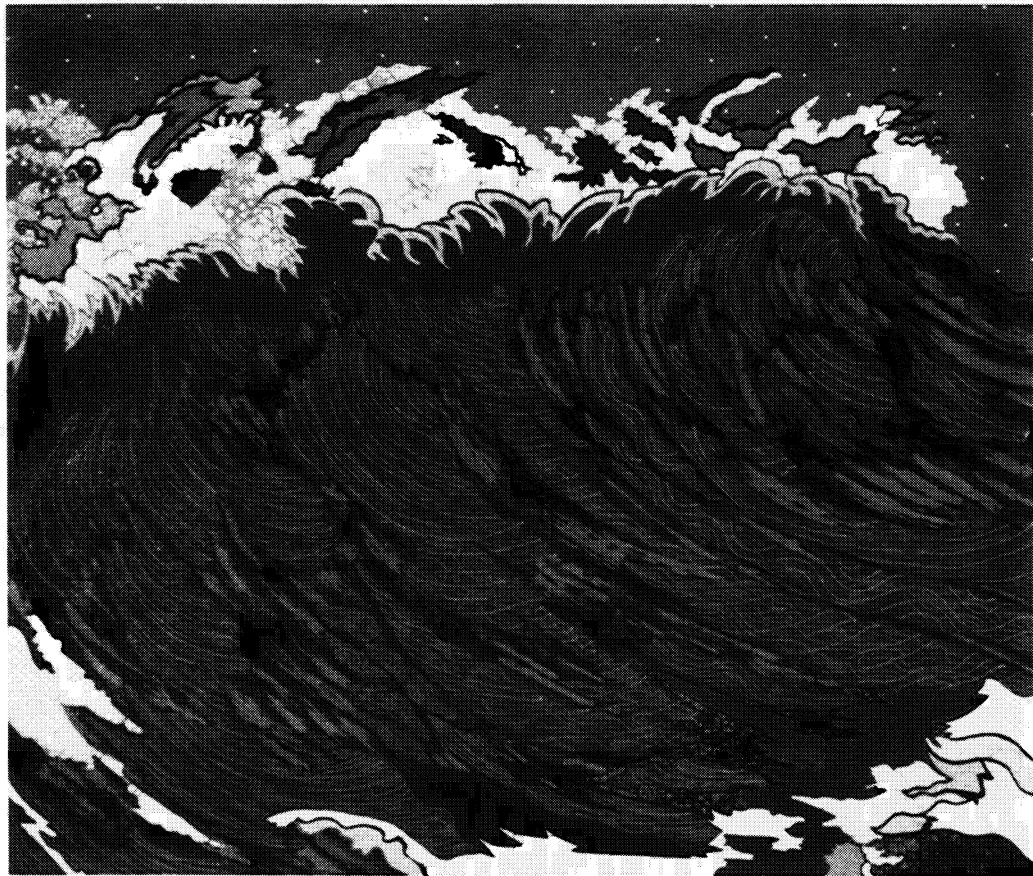
Plate 3: "Jomaya" (pseud.), "Wave Breaking" (1988), ca 150 x 65 cm, batik painting.
Photo: Astri Wright

screen-like character alternates with areas that signify *batik*, where one can feel the presence of hot wax dripped or painted on the cloth before dye was added. Amri Yahya (b. 1939), who came originally from Padang, West Sumatra, has an enormous output, employs the very best *batik*-workers who translate his painted sketches onto the cloth, runs his personal gallery successfully, leads the Islamic prayers which initiate formal artist gatherings, and in jest calls himself the king of Yogya.[52]

Living, working, and meditating with another artist caused another shift in Jono's approach to art. Deciding to work collaboratively and create the design for each piece together, the artist-team worked on the same piece of cloth with wax-brushes and *canting* (wax-pens), placing their individual "signature" styles side by side with pattern areas on which they had both worked. Thus, on a single surface, the work of each artist is in some places identifiable, such as Jono's flame-like shapes and repeated outlines and Maya's more watery shapes, often created with folding-and-dyeing techniques used in African *batik*. At other times the individual contribution is not identifiable. Even when it is, the other artist may have done the covering, scraping, or dyeing work which constitutes one of the several stages in bringing out the individual patterns. In this way, the Javanese painter and the American textile artist took their artistic process yet a further step away from Western notions of the individual self or individualistic creativity.[53] The art works were not signed; the commercial products—simplified versions of the patterns in their art works, sewn into clothing—were labeled "JOMAYA."

"Jomaya" created two of their strongest works in 1987–1988. "Wave Breaking" (**Plate 3**) is in part a quote and a tribute to Hokusai's famous wave, here transformed into a broad and powerful upward sweep of water. The top and bottom of the wave are decoratively translated into a flat ochre area with no detailing. This contrasts with the rest of the surface, which is densely treated with repeated waxing and dyeing, in a crisscrossing of turquoise and dark indigo areas and lines over a dominant ground in shades of purple. The white foam is delineated both by crackling, darker color-areas, and lines. Above it a delicate turqoise-blue sky punctuated by starry dots provides a sense of depth. It is a densely conceived and executed work, filled with surge and movement.

"Red Fire" (**Plate 4**) is dense in a different way: rather than attempting to depict burning flames, it is more conceptual and speaks to the nature of fire as symbol. Flickering, sparking, licking, darting flamelike shapes fill the work with hues of red, mauve, ochre, and yellow against darker areas of brown and indigo, all interlocking as a negative-positive so that there is no "empty" background space; each part of the two-dimensional design is a complete and equal statement in itself.

The surface treatment of each body of flame is different—some are delineated with repeated, concentric or dotted lines, other areas are dotted with large, medium, or small points, some in contrasting colors, others in shades of the same color. Yet others are crackled in a number of different ways. The work displays the variety of ways a surface can be

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[52] Personal communication, August 1987. Amri Yahya also paints oil paintings, with similar compositions and colors to his *batik* paintings, but without their clarity and sharpness.

[53] As their artistic process developed, they had to start up a more commercial line of production to try to support their costly and time-consuming art work, and *batik* workers were hired on a regular basis to do the waxing, scraping, and dyeing. These workers worked on both the commercial products and on certain parts of the art products, thus introducing yet another factor which removed the creative process from the control of the individual artist.

Plate 4: "Jomaya" (pseud.) "Api Merah" (Red Fire) (1988), 120 x 90 cm, batik painting.
Photo: Astri Wright

treated, and many of the techniques used are traditional ones. The choice of water as the subject of the previous work (symbolizing fecundity and the unification of polarities, coming as it does from the heavens to penetrate the earth, producing life) and of fire as the subject of the present predominantly red work, illustrate the artists' preoccupation with *kebatinan*. On the most basic level, according to Jono, fire and the color red represent youth, the passions, desire for wealth, and madness. They represent the earthly, material dimension. But fire also consumes earthly matter, transforming and conveying it into the ethereal. In addition to this interpretation of red, Jono interpreted other colors as follows: blue is the color of balance, equilibrium; green is the color of God; violet is the color of compatibility (as between partners or lovers); yellow is the color of love (greenish yellow represents divine love); and black is the color of one's behavior and actions. We heard previously that, according to Jono, black represents worldly desires and white symbolizes objective reality.[54]

Only a detailed account of the entire *batik*-process—making the design, drawing it on the cloth, applying the first round of wax and color, then reapplying more wax in some areas and scraping it off others, before dyeing it again, a third and fourth and possibly a fifth time—can make one fully appreciate the process that carries the artists from creative idea to end result. This process is completely different from painting in oils. To paint on a canvas is to work "in the positive," adding the forms and colors you want to see in the end result; to work in *batik* entails working "in the negative," blocking out the forms you want to appear as positive, keeping in mind at every stage what the final aim is, and allowing for the inevitable departures from this aim caused by the materials themselves, in processes involving wax, chemicals, water, sunlight, and temperatures ranging from hot to cold.

In "JOMAYA's" art is applied a notion of self similar to the *kebatinan* idea of a soul or spirit, separated from but journeying towards reintegration with the absolute, universal soul. In this perspective, the making of a work of art becomes equivalent to the mystical journey. The artist attempts to overcome the limitations of the individual self through meditating on and manipulating the materials, uniting mind with action and matter. Transforming matter becomes a metaphor for transforming the soul. By working with another artist on every step of a long and complex process, mind is united with mind—a metaphor for overcoming the illusion of separation between individuals.

Jono's father, a local *guru* in Yogyakarta whose mantle Jono has been taught since boyhood that he will inherit someday, says that, in *kebatinan*, human beings are ranked into five levels of spiritual attainment. The second highest level is held by artists.[55] Artists are per-

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[54] Personal communication, October 1988. It is interesting to compare this color-symbolism with a passage in Holt: "Although the use of colors may be becoming more arbitrary, there is still considerable consensus about their meaning. Black is supposed to indicate inner maturity, adulthood, virtue, including calmness. Red, on the other hand, denotes uncontrolled passions, desires. Gold has a double function: it may denote beauty (of the hero), royal or princely status, glory, but may also reflect the desire of the maker or owner of the puppet to make the wayang itself as beautiful as possible. White is said to indicate noble descent, youth and beauty too, but its use is ambiguous. Some say that beings with blue faces are cowardly.... The prevalent facial colors are black, red, and gold. In the course of one play the same character may appear at one time with a golden face and at another with a black face to indicate different aspects of the hero or stages in his life." Holt, *Art in Indonesia*, pp. 142–43. Between these two systems of color-symbolism, only the color red seems to hold similar meaning. The fact that the other colors are given differing interpretations may illustrate differences in place, time, and medium (Holt is speaking about dramatic make-up). It may also indicate the fluid nature of a tradition which is oral rather than based on the authority of a written text.

[55] From handout prepared for the Prakarti Foundation, Yogyakarta, October 1987. As Benedict Anderson has pointed out to me, there is no mention of artists as a separate or special group in Javanese mystical literature; this is probably therefore a recent re-writing of older ideas. To me, rather than invalidating the point, this only makes the inclusion of artists into Javanese cosmology all the more interesting, illustrating that it is not based on a static

ceived as people whose gift of seeing goes beyond the world of appearances; artists are people whose faculty of sight signifies insight.

Although many painters cited mysticism as a source of inspiration, only a few of those I encountered in Java were as active in practicing *kebatinan* techniques as Jono.[56] Whether Moslems, Protestants, or Catholics, many older as well as younger artists nonetheless draw on ideas and symbols rooted in the cultural matrix in which *kebatinan* plays a central role.

With the varying depths of personal involvement and degrees to which mystical ideas are accepted or rejected by the younger, emerging generations of artists, even the form rejection takes is shaped by what is being rejected. And since *kebatinan* still flourishes as a part of Javanese culture, some knowledge of it is essential to any scholar of Javanese art, whether traditional or modern.

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formula; indeed, that it is transforming in ways that take account of modern life. The reference to "tradition" is thus a commonly performed claim to legitimacy. In this instance, the high status given to artists may reflect Ismoyo's father's preparing his small spiritual following to accept his son as his legitimate heir.

[56] The most extreme version I heard of a painter-mystic was a painter living in or near Jakarta, who could only paint, naked, on an island off the coast. When inspired, it was said, he would throw off his clothes, jump in a row-boat and go to the island to paint. Naturally I could not find out the name or whereabouts of this painter and it is impossible to say how many feathers originated this particular chicken [cf. Norwegian proverb: "The story about the five feathers that became two chickens"]. The point is, again, the way the Indonesian imagination works with respect to the image of artists.